

KESTON L. RAMSEY: EARLY SKIING IN THE MT. ROSE AREA

Interviewee: Keston L. Ramsey

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Interviewer: Edith S. Swift

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Description

Keston Ramsey was born in 1908. He has lived most of his life in the Reno area. Mr. Ramsey was active in the ski industry from 1945 until 1964; during those years he constructed and ran the Sky Tavern Lodge at the Mt. Rose Ski Bowl, which he operated. This was the first ski operation in the Mt. Rose area and was later used by the junior ski program. During the summer months Ramsey had a successful contracting business.

The memoir includes a description of acreage Ramsey owned in the Mt. Rose vicinity, an account of how he built the Sky Tavern Lodge and lifts at Mt. Rose Ski Bowl, and a typical day on the ski slope. He discusses problems they had with the ski operation and tells about running ski meets and setting up courses for races in places such as Sky Tavern, Slide Mountain and the Mt. Rose Ski Area.

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An Oral History Conducted by Edith S. Swift

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

INTRODUCTION

Keston Ramsey has lived most of his life in the Reno area. Mr. Ramsey was active in the ski industry from 1945 until approximately 1964; during those years he ran the Sky Tavern Lodge at the Mt. Rose Ski Bowl, which he operated. He ran the first ski operation built in the Mt. Rose area.

Mr. Ramsey not only built the Sky Tavern Lodge, but he remodeled it for use for the Jr. Ski Program when it was sold in 1968. When not running the ski area, in the summer months of 1945 to 1964, he had a successful contracting business.

The memoir recorded by Mr. Ramsey includes a description of acreage he owned in the Mt. Rose vicinity, an account of how he built the Sky Tavern Lodge and lifts at Mt. Rose Ski Bowl. He described the routine of a day on the ski slope of his employees and himself. He goes into problems they had with the ski operation. He also tells about running ski meets and setting up courses for races in places such as Sky Tavern, Slide Mountain and what is now the Mt. Rose Ski Area.

When invited to participate in the oral history project, Mr. Ramsey accepted graciously. He enjoyed recording his recollections through the sessions on February 15, 1983 and March 1, 1983 at his home in Reno.

The Oral History Program of the University of Nevada Reno Library preserves the past and the present for future research by tape recording the recollections of people who have been important to the development of Nevada and the West. Resulting transcripts and supporting materials are deposited in the Special Collections departments of the University libraries at Reno and Las Vegas. Keston Ramsey has generously donated the literary rights in his oral history to the University of Nevada and has designated the volume as open for research.

Edith S. Swift
Interviewer

EARLY SKIING IN THE MOUNT ROSE AREA

Edith S. Swift: I wanted to ask you about the Sky Tavern facility. The first thing would be the purchase of the land. How did you purchase the land and when?

Keston L. Ramsey: Well, we purchased the land on the twenty-fifth of May, 1945 from Robison Neeman. At that time there was only the T-bar, which had been installed in 1944. A small building with a bedroom and a bath was all the facilities that were there at the time. We started building the hotel around the first of September of 1945 and had it open for business by December fifteenth of the same year.

We had talked about how you built it and who you used on the crew and something like this.

The material was pretty hard to get ahold of, so we had to scrounge around and there wasn't too much available, as it was right after the war. We had a hard time finding plumbing materials and electrical materials although lumber was in plentiful supply. I had two

crews of men from Reno which I brought up with me; we framed the building in after the foundation was in thirteen days from the time we started the framing until we had the roof on. After that, the plumbing and electrical work were done. In doing the outside, we had to build the parking lot, put the sewage system in, and put the water supply in. Labor was pretty short so we used some of the GIs from the Reno Army Air Base. The boys worked on night shift and we picked them up in the morning, took them up to Sky Tavern and worked them during the day. We would return them at night so that they could return to the base for their night shift.

Did you have some problems putting in the water, also putting in the sewer? That was quite a challenge.

That was quite a job. It took a lot of time and hand labor. We had to pack all of the water tank and parts up the hill by hand and the three-inch sections of water pipe. It took four men to pick one up and pack it up there,

and that's what we used the GIs for on that type of work. And the sewage system, we had a backhoe that did most of the excavating for that, but we built our own septic tank. We built a redwood ten-thousand-gallon septic tank, and then we dredged out the lake to obtain the soil to build the parking lot in front of the hotel. We ended up with parking for about three or four hundred cars, which was very limited with the full capacity crowds that we had on weekends.

You built a skating rink?

We leased the area out to a party that tried to use the little lake for a skating rink, but there were so many problems with the wind blowing the snow after the first couple of weeks, he gave it up, and decided that it wasn't the right place to have a skating rink.

And you had some storms up there that kind of interfered with it too.

Yes, it was a very wet fall, and during October and November, we averaged two storms a week. In October it mostly rained, and in November we had several snowstorms. In December we had several snowstorms. We had to haul all of our furniture up there in the blizzard. We finally had everything ready to go on the fifteenth of December. That's when our first guests started arriving.

There was more acreage involved than just Sky Tavern.

Yes. When we purchased it, we purchased approximately eight hundred acres of land which included some land below Galena Creek at the edge of the timber; it also included the parcel where Reindeer Lodge is now and another parcel where the Christmas

Tree is, that included two hundred and eighty acres up above which is now part of the Mount Rose Ski Area.

Did you want to discuss what Sky Tavern was before you developed it? What was the history on that?

As far as previous development, in 1939 and 1940, there was a small rope tow on the hill that was put in by Wayne Poulsen and another fellow—I can't think of his name right now—Ed Health. They started from where the old highway crosses the middle of the hill and went two-thirds of the way toward the top. After Mr. Neeman bought it, he kicked them off, and in 1941 I built a two-section rope tow for him, which he operated just one season and then they used the little building down below to serve sandwiches and hot dogs.

You might want to talk about why you wanted to go into this business. What was your motivation?

I had been skiing for a few years and really enjoyed it. I thought it would be fun to get into the business. It ended up being nothing but a lot of hard work. Being a contractor, the construction part of it was no problem at all.

You enjoyed skiing as well. And you had skis when you were younger?

I'd been skiing approximately four or five years. I mostly walked at that time, there being no ski tows in the area. In 1938 they had a rope tow over at Donner Summit which we used to go over there and ski. And that fall they started building the Sugar Bowl Resort which had the first chair lift in the Sierras, I believe, the first one in the West.

Did they have trouble getting access into Sugar Bowl?

The Sugar Bowl was closed on account of the war years. They had to cross the railroad tracks, which was a restricted area for several years. The Sugar Bowl didn't reopen again until 1946-47 season.

The community was pretty happy to get this resort, weren't they?

Reno and the Chamber of Commerce were very supportive of the efforts we made up there, but the only problem was it was a small area we had when the crowds were so large, so that every year we had to increase the facilities to take care of the extra people. Of course the highway, at that time, was closed at Sky Tavern and the road couldn't be kept open to Incline and Lake Tahoe. At that time there was nothing at Incline except three or four homes. That development all came later. The existing highway, which bypassed Sky Tavern, was not completed until 1960.

We might want to talk about the everyday work week on the hill. What did the people do who worked on the hill, what was their schedule?

The first year that we were in operation, we had no electricity; we had a generator, which generated our power. All the ski lifts had to be operated with gasoline motors, which meant that we had to pack the gasoline up every morning, and we had no grooming equipment. Everything had to be done by hand. We had to dig out the bottom and top terminal every morning, when we had heavy snows. We had no telephone for two years, so the conditions were pretty primitive there the first two or three years. It wasn't until five years after we opened before we got three-

phase power so that we could convert the lifts over to electricity.

What did the people have to do on the hill every day to get the slopes ready?

We'd have to round up a bunch of skiers and the ski patrol and take them up on the T-bar and let them sideslip down the hill, in order to pack the slope. We usually started out with a limited area during the day where we could ski, and then during the day as more area got skied out, we could expand and ski more of the slopes.

Did they start work about eight a.m. in the morning?

The employees would get there at eight, but we ran the lifts from ten until four. There was usually a few hours work in the morning, getting everything ready. We had to get the gasoline up there and get the lifts going.

How many employees did you have on the hill?

We had two regular full-time employees, one at the bottom and one at the top, and on weekends, we had quite a few volunteer people who worked part-time. Some were from the University of Nevada and some of the local ranchers and their sons came up and helped us.

Who did you have working in the end?

We had to have one at the top to make sure no one was tangled in the T-bar, and one at the bottom and he sold tickets at the same time. On weekends we had to have extra people to sell tickets and two or three people alternating on loading.

How much did it cost to ski?

When we first started it was \$1.50 on the T-bar and \$1.00 for the rope tows. There were separate tickets; for \$1.50 you could ski the rope tow and the T-bar, and for \$1.00 you could ski the rope tows. There was a beginners' rope tow and a fairly steep tow that was for advanced skiers.

In the Sky Tavern Inn there were employees?

We had a hotel with twenty rooms. It could take care of fifty-two people, so we had to have a full set of employees for the kitchen, two chefs and a dishwasher, and a relief dishwasher and two waitresses. In the hotel we had two maids and two girls in the office. We had a little coffee shop which took two employees, except on weekends when we had extra people. We had a bar with a regular bartender and two extra bartenders on weekends. We had to haul our own supplies up and take all of our garbage down to Reno. You couldn't get anything delivered in those days.

During 1952, wasn't there a time in which you were snowed in and didn't have any supplies?

In 1952, we were snowed in for approximately six weeks and had twenty feet of snow. There was four feet of snow in Reno at that time, and during the big storm in January, the power line going up to the microwave station was obliterated, and an avalanche took out six spans of poles. And the Bell Telephone Company brought a crew of men up with their Sno-Cats, and we put them up at the hotel, and they brought three big bulldozers up. They pulled all the new poles and wires and everything over the snow up to Sky Tavern and then cleared a road from Sky Tavern to the base of Mount Rose, and then went in with a crew and replaced

the power line so that the microwave station could be put back in business again. It was six weeks, and during that time we had to shovel the top and bottom terminals out. At the top terminal there was several feet of snow over the top of the cables of the top terminal. We had a trench almost thirty feet deep to go, in order to unload the top terminal of the T-bar where the bullwheel was. We had to shovel the snow out in three layers. We had to shovel it up a little ways, shovel it some more in order to get it over the top and out of the way.

Did you have any problems with the lifts?

No. Wind didn't bother the lift like it does the chair lift. We could run in any kind of weather. Usually there were only a few days out of the season when we couldn't run. We could run practically every day. People would have to call up on the telephone to find out if we were operating. They could pretty near always depend on it; usually we would go the whole season and there were only two or three days when we were closed.

Would you like to go over some of the social activities?

We didn't have too much activity. People would dance in the bar at night if they wanted to, and that was the only regular activity they had. Reno Ski Club would have an occasional party, several times a year. We would put on several major ski meets every year which attracted many people, but most of the activities for that were held down in Reno. We had the records on the juke box and people could play whatever they wanted. If they wanted to do the folk dances that was up to them. We didn't have any regular entertainment, except one year, we had a fellow with an accordion which went over pretty good.

How late did people ski?

We would run the lifts from ten until four. Along towards spring, as the days got longer we would run them until four-thirty.

How many lifts were there?

We just had one T-bar. Also a total of three rope tows. We had these lifts until we sold it. We sold it in 1959. The people that purchased it put in another platterpull, which operated for about four years, at which time they defaulted on their payments and we repossessed it, and in 1964 we sold it to the Mount Rose Development Company. They operated it one year before they built the chair lifts up at Mount Rose, and after that they leased the Sky Tavern area to the Reno Junior Ski Program. Reno leased it for two or three years and then they purchased the land and built all new lifts. These are the same lifts that are up there today.

There were a lot of groups up there that you supported.

We helped the UNR Ski Team by giving them free access to the lifts and helping to put on their ski meets, especially the Winter Carnival. We also helped sponsor the Junior Ski Program which started out with just a few children and ended up with several hundred on a Saturday or Sunday. The Junior Ski Program was promoted through the Reno Ski Club and Marcie Herz and a couple of other individuals who asked us if we would cooperate with it. We said that we would. We gave them reduced rates on the lift, and so they started by bringing the children up in buses and furnishing them with instruction and lifts, or they had to bring their own lunches or buy food at the coffee shop. The

Junior Ski Program was subsidized by the Reno Service clubs. Some of the clubs were the Lions Club and Reno South Reno Lions Club and other service clubs in Reno. Eventually the City of Reno Recreation Department took it over and started contributing money to it. After that it started increasing by leaps and bounds.

You had a ski school at Sky Tavern?

We had a ski school and a ski shop that was leased out. We didn't operate those two facilities ourselves, but they were concessions. Hal Coddling came over in 1948 from Sun Valley and he had the ski school for several years. After he left, his cousin or nephew, Bud Schonfeld, took it over and he operated a ski school for three or four years, and Gordie Wren had it for a couple of years until the time that we sold it.

Did you have something to do with getting Hal Coddling over from Sun Valley?

I brought Hal Coddling over from Sun Valley, to take over the ski school, and I built him a house up there to help him locate his family. Gordie Wren came over on his own and he had our ski school and the one at Slide Mountain. He also worked for the City Recreation Department, handling the Junior Ski Program. He was there up until the time that we sold the area.

The Far West Ski Association was an organization that you had something to do with.

We let them use the facilities. We were affiliated with the National Ski Patrol. Myself and some of the others around there would handle the First Aid, but on weekends— there

were quite a large number of ski patrollers available, every weekend. They were all trained here in Reno in First Aid, and Ski Rescue.

You were also in charge of recruiting for the mountain troops in World War II.

I was in charge of recruiting for the Army, in recruiting mountain troops. That was a separate unit. They were recruiting skiers for skiing in Italy.

We could go over the other ski areas and what was going on at the time that Sky Tavern was going on.

Squaw Valley was built about two or three years after Sky Tavern opened. Along came Alpine Meadows and Heavenly Valley. In 1952 and 1953 there was big talk about developing Slide Mountain. That was finally finalized on the promotion about 1953. They opened two chair lifts in 1954. The lower chair lift had to be built because the road wasn't completed into Slide Mountain until 1955. The lower chair lift was only used for one season as an access lift. It was abandoned after that first year. Slide Mountain operated several years with that one chair lift. Then they built another beginners' lift and eventually another additional chair lift.

Who developed Slide Mountain?

It was a promotion deal. A fellow by the name of Carl Feutsch took charge of promoting it. He raised most of the money from the local clubs. The local clubs donated twenty-five to fifty thousand dollars apiece for stock in it. They raised about five hundred thousand dollars and built two chair lifts—the access lift, and the upper chair lift—and the

shelter, and did some of the initial clearing. After several years, they ran into financial difficulties and it was in bankruptcy, and it was put out for bid. Wes Howell was the only bidder, and so he took over the operation. After two or three years he took in a couple of partners for fifty-one percent of the stock, and he—they booted him out and left him holding the bag. It has changed [hands several times since then.

I wanted to ask you about your involvement in racing. I know that you were involved in the Silver Dollar Derby.

In the late forties and early fifties, we used to put on the Silver Dollar Derby races. This was sponsored by the Reno Ski Club and the Reno Chamber of Commerce. The downhill course was held over on Slide Mountain. There were no lifts in that area at that time, so we had to pack everything in on our backs, including the slalom poles and First Aid toboggans, and set up the course and pack the hills. We did considerable blasting of stumps. This was when there wasn't too much snow and we could get rid of the obstacles. The slalom part of the race was held at Sky Tavern.

How was that different than it is today, that is setting up a course?

There was a lot more work because we didn't have any packing equipment, nor any Sno-Cats, and everything had to be packed in by hand and packed back out again. Any toboggans with injuries had to be pulled all the way out to the main highway. It was quite a project. We had to spend several days ahead of time in there packing the course and sideslipping up and down and setting the downhill. Also we had to set the flags for the downhill course. It was an extremely long

course, almost two miles long. It was from the top of Slide Mountain down to the valley floor (almost). We had some of the top racers in the world here at different times. It was a national race.

How was the First Aid different then than it is today?

We used regular toboggans that were set up with different splints. We had bandages. None of the modern equipment was on the hill that they have now. We had wooden toboggans with the slats and ropes on the sides. Usually we had two people to take them down. We didn't have brakes on them, and it took two persons to take them down in a sideslip to bring them down on the steepest part of the hill. On the flat we had to pull them by hand until you got them to the First Aid room. There were no ambulances available at that time; we had to provide transportation to the hospital in a station wagon with removable seats. Usually the type of injuries seen were fractured legs. The main type would be the small tibia bone although we had a few serious fractures. There weren't too many, considering the amount of people who were skiing in those days.

The bindings were real crude release bindings. The bindings were not near as sophisticated as they are today. The cable type was the only type available. Some people went for the—what they called the “long thongs” or what is called “beartrap bindings.” You are in those to stay and there is no way that you can possibly come out of one of those. The beartrap looked like this. It was a toe piece, and your sole fitted under two little clips, and leather straps bound you in tight. There was no way that you could come out of these, without undoing the straps. That is why they called them beartraps.

They were all wooden skis at that time. The metal edges were put on with screws. It was quite a few years before they came out with plastic bottoms. You had to use several coats of lacquer and then use your wax on top of that in order to make them hold up so that the lacquer wouldn't wear out.

Were most of the races held at Sky Tavern?

The slalom was always held at Sky Tavern; that was the only ski area in the immediate vicinity—Slide Mountain where we had the downhill. During the Winter Carnival, we had the forty-meter ski jump at Sky Tavern, which was usually always a big event and drew tremendous crowds. Some of the major colleges in the western part of the United States competed, all the way from Denver west. Racers from Wyoming, California, Nevada, Oregon, Colorado, Washington and Utah. These were the major colleges that competed. We also had several local college meets that weren't on the national level. Denver and Utah didn't usually compete in the smaller meets which were held at Sky Tavern. Mostly Oregon, California, Washington and Nevada competed in these. Sometimes they were held at Yosemite, Sky Tavern, or Sugar Bowl, and the national intercollegiate meets were held sometimes in Denver, or once in Banff, or Mount Hood.

The racing technique isn't all that different, but you have better, sophisticated equipment nowadays. It makes it much easier to ski on, and modern skis are much easier to ski on, especially hard pack and ice. I think that if the earlier contestants had the modern equipment that they could keep up with what the modern skiers can do.

I read about some of your racing in the scrapbooks.

The only time that I ever competed myself was with the local ski club meets or something like that. That was more of a fun race. We didn't have any of the top contestants like they do in the college meets. The slalom was the only race that I ever entered in. I never entered any downhill races. I entered some fun races, obstacle courses, but they were more luck than anything else.

Did you want to talk about your two boys and what they did in racing at Sky Tavern when you were there?

They both skied for the Reno High School and the University of Nevada. They both did very well, especially in slalom events. Allen was very good in fourway. He took first in several intercollegiate events in fourway. Bob excelled in the downhill and slalom and jumping, but he seldom went in for cross-country.

How did they learn to ski?

We had some instruction. In the early day we didn't have any good racing instructors, but in 1948, Hal Codding came to Sky Tavern from Sun Valley and he had been a racing coach at Sun Valley. So we had his coaching and help, which proved very good. In fact, he coached the UNR Ski Team several years. The team did very well and took several collegiate championships, every year that they competed; 1950-1956 were the years that they competed. Bob graduated from the University in 1954, and Allen graduated in 1956. So that was the end of their competition. At that time they didn't have these professional ski meets the way they do nowadays. The only professionals were the ski instructors. Everything was amateur. The Olympics, too, was amateur. Allen and Bob

both competed with some of the top skiers in the Sun Valley American Legion Far Western Championships against boys that finally made the Olympic team, and both boys beat some of the boys that did make the Olympic team in some of their meets.

The trophy that I saw up at Sky Tavern. Was it connected with a derby?

The Silver Dollar Derby was put on by the Reno Ski Club and the Chamber of Commerce. Most of the trophies were silver dollar belt buckles. I guess they did have a few trophies that were donated by the Chamber of Commerce or the Ski Club. The trophy at Sky Tavern was donated by Walter and Howie Herz and the Ramsey family in memory of Marcie Herz. It was donated to the Junior Ski Program as a perpetual trophy.

When you had the carnival in the winter, you said all the events except the races were held down in Reno. Where were they held?

The sororities and fraternities held special events. The main ball was held in the auditorium down in Reno. It was the auditorium but it is the Pioneer now. It was torn down and rebuilt. The other activities were held up on the ski hill. Each sorority and fraternity held different events in their own facilities. Usually the slalom and jumping events were at Sky Tavern. Sometimes the downhill was at the present Mount Rose area and sometimes on Slide Mountain. The cross-country race was usually held down at the Galena Creek area when there was enough snow. Most of the time they didn't like to have the cross-country race up that high like at Sky Tavern.

Are the runs the same as at Sky Tavern now?

There are higher capacity lifts now. We just had one T-bar then and three rope tows. One rope tow was the same as the existing rope tow that provides access up to the lower platter-pull lifts. And then we had another rope tow that started at the bottom of where the T-bar was, and it ran up at an angle about halfway up the hill. Further to the north, we had another lift that went up quite a bit higher than where the existing beginners' lifts are situated. For three or four years on the hill right opposite the lodge, where the jump hill is, we had one rope tow that went up two-thirds up that hill. We used that during the ski meets to take the jumpers up.

We never had any particular names for the lifts. Where the Rocco lift is now was another lift that went considerably higher up the hill. Rocco Spina was head of the Reno Recreation Commission for several years, and he was instrumental in helping the Reno Junior Ski Program through the city of Reno to buy the Sky Tavern area. That lift was named after Marcie Herz, and she was the one that originally got the idea for starting the Junior Ski Program with the cooperation of the Reno Ski Club and Sky Tavern, and some of the local clubs sponsored the Junior Ski Program. She was quite prominent in it for several years. Then Gordon Wren was the next one to take over. Then Norman Olsen was the director for a long time. Leon Stanley is the present director.

Norm Olsen had the other Poma lift name for him.

Evidently, Norm Olsen was the director for quite a few years after Gordon Wren left. I think he left around 1959, when Norm Olsen took over.

When was the forty-meter ski jump put in at Sky Tavern?

The forty-meter jump was built in 1948. At that time we had the old Mount Rose Highway which went across the lower part of the jump. As soon as we had enough snow, we had to build a wooden framework to carry the transition up across the road to where the jump took off. In the spring, we would have to tear it out, so that they could plow the road; the road at that time was closed to Lake Tahoe after the first storm. The road wasn't reopened until late in the spring. The ski jump was built in the summer of 1948. We had a big D8 Cat up there that did most of the work. We had to do some of the fine grading by hand.

Who did you use for a crew?

We had some regular employees that worked part-time in the summer. Otis Turner was one of them. He worked up there for quite a few years. He operated the lifts in the winter and worked for me in the contracting business in the summer. Weekends we'd work up there getting everything ready for the next winter. I had a few University boys who'd come up and help us in order to get lift privileges.

Do you remember the incident at Slide Mountain December 1, 1953, when they had to evacuate the lift?

The year that they started Slide Mountain, the first year that they were operating they gave everybody in Reno free rides on the lift. There wasn't enough snow to operate the lift. A foot or two of snow was in the hills but it wasn't enough for skiing; in the middle of the day the cable slipped off of the drive wheel, I believe, they had to unload all of the people with ropes, and they had to walk down through the snow, and some of them just had their high heel shoes on. It was quite a project getting them all off the lift and getting them

back to the lodge. It wasn't very good for the first day's operation. No one was hurt. It just derailed and they stopped it immediately. There were a few wet and cold feet.

In 1953 you had quite a few revisions in the lodge.

In 1953, we built a new bar on the main level and a new recreation room and new lunch room for the juniors on the lower level. It made it much nicer and we could take care of a much larger group of people. The upstairs bar and lounge had a big deck in front of it, facing the ski hill. It had windows on three sides where you could look out into the valley or watch the skiers skiing. It was very popular. A lot of the people who didn't ski would drive up on Saturday and Sunday afternoons and watch the skiers or watch their children ski.

Could you go over what the lodge looked like then and what it looks like now.

Before, the main part of the hotel included twenty rooms, on three levels. It had a very steep-pitched roof. After the city of Reno bought it, they made a deal with me to remodel it for them. The money was put up by the Fleischmann Foundation. I tore the two top floors of the hotel off completely. I put a new roof on. Instead of a pitched roof sloping both ways, I put a sloping roof toward the back and made a large lunch room approximately thirty-two by fifty-two feet. Then the full basement underneath was converted into restrooms, ski shop, and then First Aid. I took the bar out and used that for an additional lunch room. Part of the lower cafeteria was converted into new restrooms. We tore down the help's quarters on the back of where the dining room area is and built a new kitchen to serve as the kitchen area. There

are two areas upstairs and one downstairs now where the kids can eat. These areas were where the original bar was and where the old hotel was. There were two stories of the lodge that were completely torn off the lodge. These two stories contained the bedrooms. There were seven rooms on each floor, each with a private bath. The third floor was six dormitories and two restrooms.

Was there a problem with avalanches in the Sky Tavern area?

We never had to worry about avalanches in the Sky Tavern area. There were no avalanche problems at all in leading up to the Sky Tavern area on the road. Although after they developed Slide Mountain, they had one real bad area going in there which I understand they are having problems with now.

One time they were opening the road into Slide Mountain with a big rotary plow. A large avalanche came down and pushed the rotary plow approximately eight feet sideways on the road. It was buried almost completely in the snow. There was just a foot of the window showing on one side. The uphill side of the plow was completely buried. The plow operator had the window open, and the snow came in and completely buried him. He was up to his waist in snow. He could still breathe. They rushed back to Sky Tavern to get some of us to help. We helped dig the plow out. We dug down and dug down one side and the back. They brought another rotary up and they thought that they could pull it out without digging the other side out, against our advice. After he hooked onto it and started pulling, he tore his transmission completely out in the second rotary. We had two disabled rotaries up there stuck in an avalanche. It took them quite a while to get the equipment back

out again. That was the only time we had any avalanche problems at all at Sky Tavern or Slide Mountain.

In 1952 you mentioned—.

In 1951, 1952, that was the biggest storm that they had had in the last fifty years. We had six feet of snow. We were snowed in from Christmas to New Year's. New Year's Day, they got the road open. The next day it started to snow and it snowed for seven days and seven nights without stopping. The wind was averaging from eighty to one-hundred miles per hour. When it quit, there was over twenty feet of snow on the level. About the third day they had a tremendous avalanche on the south slopes of Mount Rose. It came down and wiped out six spans of poles on the power line that leads up to the Bell Telephone microwave station. It sheared off a whole row of aspen trees and carried them almost a hundred feet up the side of a hill on the other side of the valley. Some of them were standing up like they were still growing.

We were snowed in for about six weeks, while they were using the main plows down on the main highway in Reno, which had four feet of snow. The Bell Telephone Company brought a crew of men up that worked for Harker and Harker, pole line contractors. They brought three big Allis Chalmers TD24 Caterpillars, that were the biggest in the world at that time. They pulled all the poles and the wire and everything up to the Sky Tavern area. Then they plowed a road down to the bare ground all the way to the base of Mount Rose through approximately twenty feet or more of snow. They went back in and replaced the power line. During that time the Bell Telephone Company supplied us with supplies with their Sno-Cat. We put up all the line crew and employees at the hotel. The

following year they moved the power line over to the other side of the valley, up through the Mount Rose Canyon so that they wouldn't have to put up with that problem any more.

That was one of the biggest avalanches that they have ever had in that area. It must have been three-quarters of a mile wide. Most of the storm came from the northwest and filled in all the shutes on the south side of Mount Rose, and when it went everything went at once. It took us six weeks to dig out our lifts. The top terminal was completely buried. The cable at the top had several feet of snow at the top of it. We had to hike up every day. It got so deep that we had to handle the snow three times to get it out. Then we cut off some aspen trees and planted them on each side of the cut that we put up there. After the road was open we brought some lumber up from Reno, boxed in the deal and made a regular cave so that the lift could go through, to the top terminal and back out again. We unloaded the skiers a hundred feet further down the hill than we normally did. The following year we decided to move the terminal over the top of the hill, and built it up higher so that it would take care of this particular type of condition.

I forgot to say that before they let the power company crew go in there, that they brought Monty Atwater, who was the avalanche expert from Utah in there. He and I and the Forest Service employee from Oregon hiked to the top of Mount Rose two days in a row with high explosives on our backs. We shot all the remaining cornices and cleared the area before they would let the crew go in, work on replacing the power line.

Did you want to say something about the homes that you built up at Sky Tavern?

My own place I built in 1945. It was just a small two bedroom and bath on the lower

level and just a living room on the upper level. Then in 1948, when I brought Hal Coddling over from Sun Valley, he spent the first year in my little cabin up there; and then the following year I built a little house for him, consisting of a basement and two bedrooms and a bath. He had a wife and a little girl. They lived there for several years, and they ended up with six children. I built his house about 1950. He was a veteran. He flew bombing missions over Japan in World War II. He obtained a veteran's loan in order to build this house.

He had the ski school and ski shop there for several years; later on he moved to Reno, and he let Schonfeld take over the ski school and run it for several years. The last year that we were operating, Gordon Wren had the ski school. Gordon Wren operated the ski school at both Slide Mountain and Sky Tavern.

Coddling's home has been sold three or four times, and it is still up there. It is the first little one as you go up; the second one belonged to Prince Hawkins. The one above me was originally built the same time as mine by Tommy Harrison, who was sales representative for Hirsh Weiss Ski Clothing out of Portland, Oregon. That has since changed hands several times.

What happened with the Reindeer Lodge; you had owned that parcel.

The Reindeer Lodge: Robison Neeman, who we had purchased the land from, took back the land. We sold about six acres of land to Johnny Ross, who built the Christmas Tree. Robison Neeman took back a portion of the land that he was selling to us, that included the Reindeer Lodge and the parcel across the street where Bud Schonfeld had his Tannenbaum Ski Area. That included the

forty acres where the hill is across the street from the Reindeer Lodge. They drilled several wells and they couldn't find any water. The Reindeer Lodge just had a very small trickle of water, hardly enough to operate. Quite a few years later they combined with the Christmas Tree and filed on a spring down in back of the Christmas Tree and developed a good water supply that is now used for the Reindeer Lodge. And Bud Schonfeld's Tannenbaum Ski Area use that water. The Christmas Tree used their water too.

The Reindeer Lodge was built in 1948 or 1950. Originally they moved three dormitory-type buildings from Herlong and joined them together. They put a roof over it. It was quite a screwed up mess, but they eventually remodeled it and made it like it is today. They added some rooms on the second floor. It has been remodeled extensively several times since then.

Do you remember who originally built it?

A fellow by the name of Vanderhyde was the name of the fellow who originally built it. The original Christmas Tree had a fire and burned down. They rebuilt the existing building which is in a different location. The fireplace is still sticking up from the original Christmas Tree out there in the parking lot all by itself.

Do you know what year the original Christmas Tree was built?

That was in 1946 or 1947. The new Christmas Tree was built in the early sixties.

Who bought that parcel from you?

Johnny Ross bought that parcel from me, when they built the original Christmas Tree.

Are there any other structures on that parcel of eight hundred acres that you bought that we haven't discussed?

The only other structure is where the Stockhorse Inn is now. That was originally a bar that was down at the foot of the Mount Rose Highway just after you go into the timber. It was moved up to the Sky Tavern area about 1940 or 1941. It was closed during the war years. When we bought it, we used it mostly for the extra help's quarters, until when they started building Slide Mountain, we remodeled it completely. We put a full basement under it and new restrooms. It was supposed to be the service area for Slide Mountain, when they had the two-section lifts going up there. After the first year, they abandoned the lower lift, because they built the road into the middle of Slide Mountain, so they had no need for further use for the lower lift. So as far as the building being a service area for Slide Mountain, they had no further use for that. Since then, it has been operated by quite a few people as a bar and restaurant. No one seems to have much success with the operation of it.

What year did the road go into Slide Mountain?

I think it was 1954 or 1955 when the road was completed going into Slide Mountain. There was a big dedication ceremony. Everybody came up, and the governor was there. The Chamber of Commerce was there, and there was a big ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The last two things I have a question on are what was the relationship between Sky Tavern and Slide Mountain?

The lower lift that was built into Slide was built as an access lift. Twelve hundred

feet of that was on Sky Tavern property. We gave them a right-of-way at no cost, and the center portion belonged to Redfield. Redfield made a deal with them for a percentage of the gross revenue on that particular lift. The upper portion of the lift was on a portion of Redfield property that was condemned (taken away from him) by Washoe County. Slide Mountain now—a portion of it is on county property and a portion of it is on Forest Service property. Washoe County condemned a portion of that where the lower terminal and the lifts are now. That originally was a part of Redfield's.

So the first year you had to take the chair up to Slide Mountain.

You could take the chair up to Slide from Sky Tavern. You had to take the chair back to Sky Tavern or ski down from Slide. You couldn't have a continuous ski run all the way back. There were a few places where you had to climb up a small hill before you could reach enough incline to ski down again. There was just a short fifty- or sixty-foot pitch that you had to climb up.

What was your area called?

We called the area the Mount Rose Bowl, and the lodge was called Sky Tavern Lodge.

What was going on at Mount Rose at that time?)

We owned where the existing Mount Rose Ski Area is now. We owned two hundred eighty acres in that area. The only skiing up there was when we let Slide Mountain cut a few trails on what is now the Mount Rose area. These trails were where the northwest trails and the Kit Carson trails are now. There were

two trails cut through there. People could ride the Slide Mountain lift, and then they would have to hike over the top of the hill, and then ski back down one of these runs and go down to the intersection of the road that goes up to Slide Mountain. There were buses there to take the skiers up to the lift again. The existing Mount Rose Highway wasn't completed until 1960. There were about five years there that we had this bus service. Even after they built the existing highway (the Mount Rose Ski Area wasn't built until 1965), they still used that bus service during the early sixties. The buses were free.

Is there anything that you'd like to talk about that we haven't mentioned?

It's been a lot of fun and a lot of hard work. Just like a farmer, we had to depend on the weather. We either had too much snow or not enough. It never seemed to be just right. We were either shoveling it in or shoveling it out.

Is there anything that you would have had, had you had the area now that you didn't have then?

We'd have had more modern lifts. We went in there on a shoestring and developed it, and every year the business would increase, and every year we would have to put everything that we'd made back into it. Today, you would have to spend \$140,000 for one piece of the snow-grooming equipment. That was more money than we would take in in a whole year. The hill would get moguled up, but we would have a group of skiers go up and sideslip it down. Usually they would just ski it out. It would get moguled up pretty good, but after a snowstorm it would fill it in pretty good. Nowadays people tear up the hill more, and then they didn't tear up the hill as bad, then.

Is there anything else that we should talk about?

In 1945 or 1946, the first year of operation, we were about the only area that was open after World War II; there was quite a large group of people from the movie industry who came up and skied. A fellow by the name of Siggie Engel, who was later on the director of the Sun Valley Ski School, brought up these different groups of people, including Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman, Jennifer Jones, John Hodiak, and quite a few others too numerous to mention. They all seemed to enjoy the area. It was quite popular at that time. Our hotel was full all the time.

Then during 1952, when we were snowed in, Joe Dimaggio was renting a little cabin just below Sky Tavern. He came up to Sky Tavern with his ex-wife and son and spent a few days. He was snowed in for quite a while. He finally got out after they got the road back open again. Lowell Thomas was up there, and I skied with him part of a day. He made one of these national radio broadcasts from our area, over the telephone, while he was up there. He and his son and I skied, and they were both very nice.

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